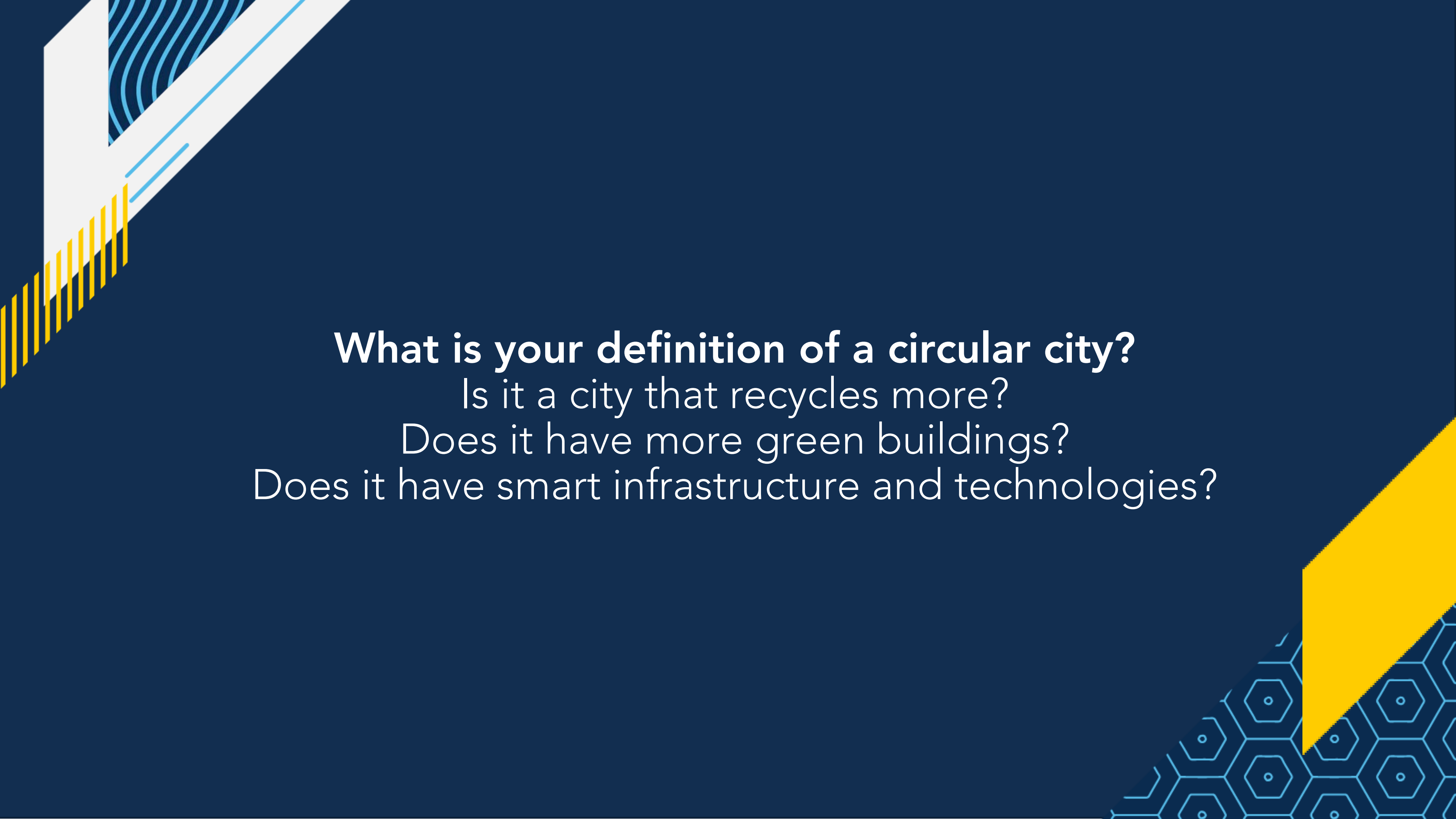


The Circular City We Already Have

Recognition without romanticising inequality.

The background is a solid dark blue. In the top-left corner, there is a white geometric shape with a blue wavy pattern inside it. Below this, a series of yellow vertical lines of varying heights create a staircase-like effect. In the bottom-right corner, there is a yellow triangular shape pointing upwards, and below it, a pattern of white hexagons with small circles inside, arranged in a grid-like fashion.

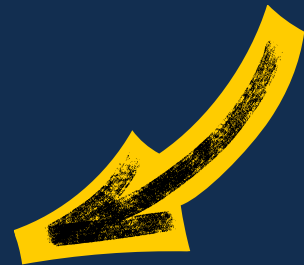
What is your definition of a circular city?

Is it a city that recycles more?

Does it have more green buildings?

Does it have smart infrastructure and technologies?

A circular city...



Keeps **value** in use for much longer



- Materials
- Buildings
- Spaces
- Infrastructures
- Skills
- Ecosystems



How

- Maintenance
- Reuse
- Repair
- Recovery
- Adaptation
- Regeneration

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Circularity is not absent from South African cities. It is often already present, but hidden in undervalued, informal, inherited and survival-based practices.

Recognition ≠ romanticisation

The point is not to celebrate informality as design solution:

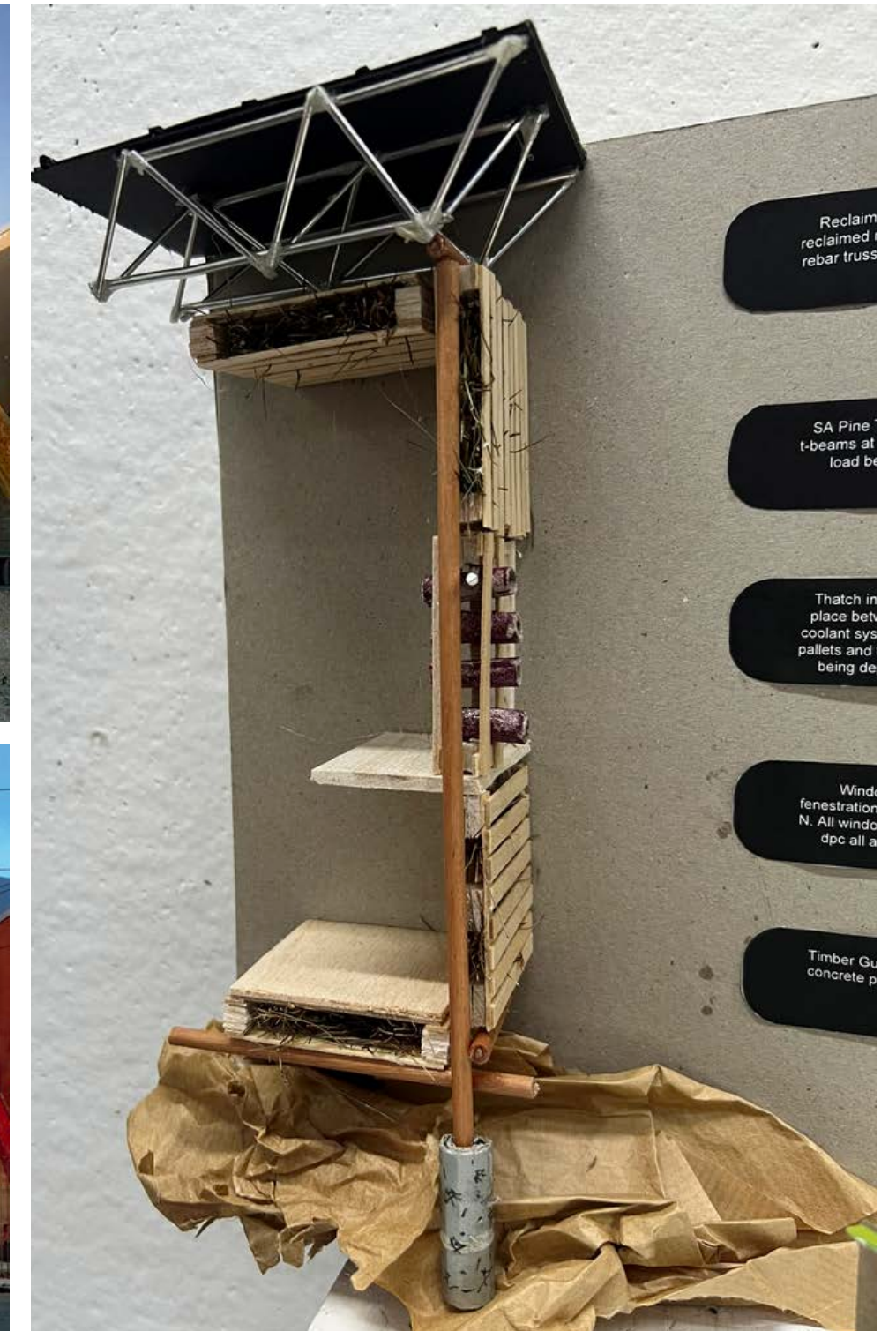
- Ask what circular principles are already present in practices of maintenance, reuse, repair, adaptation and shared use
- Ask how these can be supported without romanticising the conditions that made them necessary.



Informal practices can reveal circular principles, but also expose systemic failure.



INCREMENTAL (2004)



Magwira (2025)

Reading everyday circularity

Reuse & Repair

Extend material & product life

Maintenance

Keep systems alive

Recovery

Turning waste into value

Adaptation

Making space work under constraint

Regeneration

Restore ecological and social function



Great Mosque - Djenné, Mali

What is happening?

- Annual *crépissage* (replastering) of the mosque

Circular logic:

- Collective maintenance & repair
- Local material cycles

What it teaches urban systems:

- Circularity begins with care and maintenance, not only with end-of-life recycling.

Critical caution:

- Heritage politics, labour, climate exposure & regional conflict.



Makaveli (2023)



Ravier (n.d)



Morris (2003)

Warwick Junction, Durban, South Africa

What is happening?

- 6,000 - 9,000 daily traders, with more than 450,000 people passing through the area daily
- 30 tons of cardboard recycled daily

Circular logic:

- Reuse, redistribution, packaging recovery and local economic circulation.

What it teaches urban systems:

- How urban space can either destroy or support existing livelihood systems.

Critical caution:

- Contestation, management, sanitation, safety, land pressure, risk of displacement.



Architect Africa (2015)



Quazi (2016)

Kibera public space projects, Nairobi, Kenya

What is happening?

- A network of community-designed “productive public spaces” on underused, polluted and flood-prone sites.

Circular logic:

- Water use and management, flood-risk reduction, shared infrastructure, community maintenance, income generation and ecological remediation.

What it teaches urban systems:

- Circularity is not only about materials.
- Designing public space so that water, waste, movement, livelihood, safety and ecological repair work together in one place.

Critical caution:

- Maintenance, governance, safety, land pressure, sanitation, and political support.



Kounkuey Design Initiative (n.d)



Kounkuey Design Initiative (n.d)



Kounkuey Design Initiative (n.d)

Gando Primary School, Burkina Faso

What is happening?

- Francis Kéré's school uses local clay-based construction, passive ventilation, shaded roof strategies and community participation to create a cooler learning environment.

Circular logic:

- Local materials, passive cooling, skills transfer, community construction and long-term maintenance capacity.

What it teaches urban systems:

- Circular design starts with climate, material knowledge, labour and maintenance: not only with waste recovery.

Critical caution:

- Do not reduce participation to romantic imagery or unpaid labour.



Ouwerkerk (2001)



Ouwerkerk (2001)

Four moves toward a more circular city

Recognise

Map existing circular practices before proposing new interventions

Protect

Avoid displacing informal workers, local practices or community systems

Connect

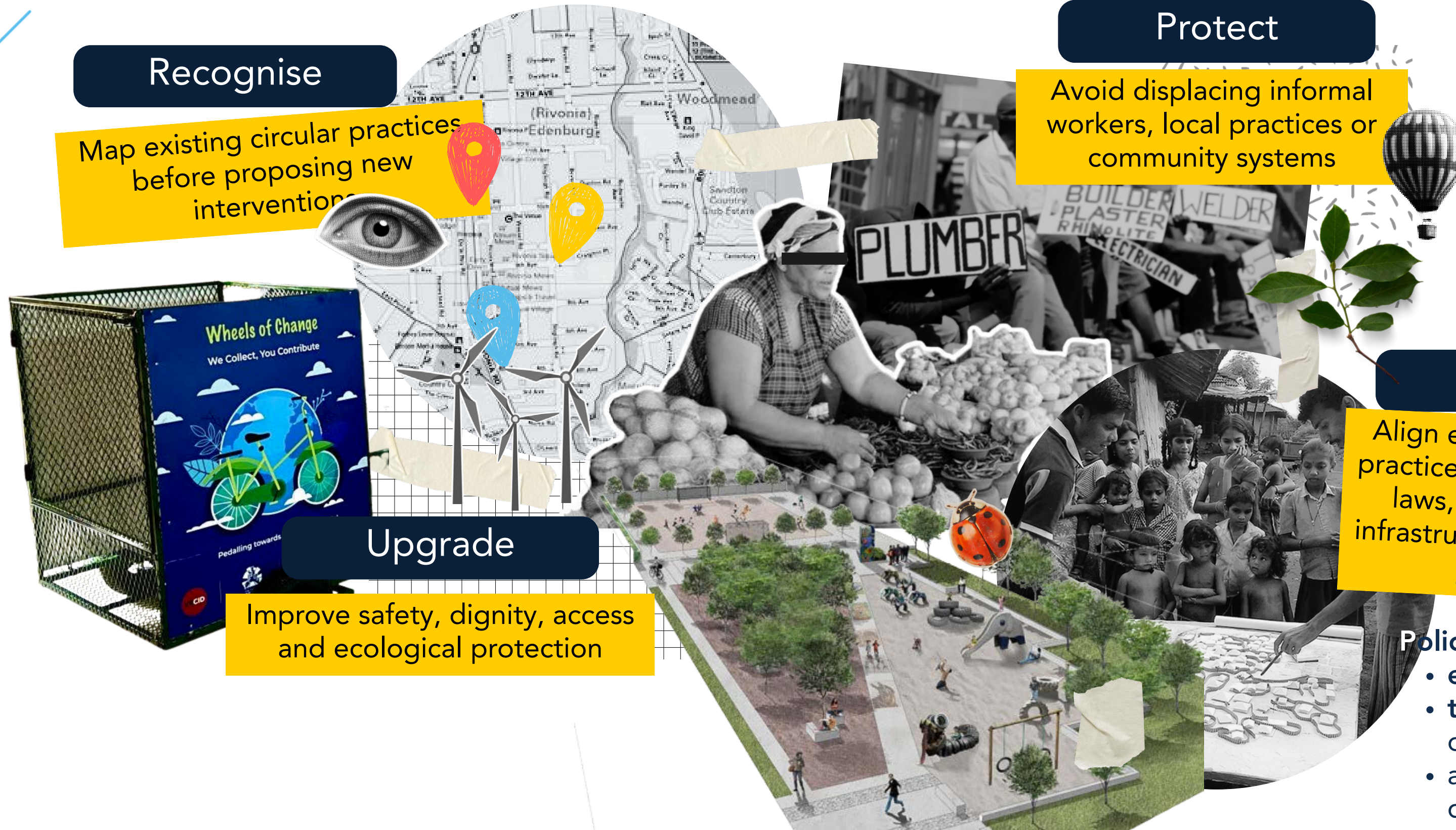
Align everyday circular practices with policy, by-laws, procurement, infrastructure and spatial planning

Upgrade

Improve safety, dignity, access and ecological protection

Policy can:

- **erase** these systems;
- **tolerate** them at the margins; or
- actively **enable** them through design, procurement and service delivery.



From local circular practice to execution and policy alignment

Existing circular logic	Built-environment translation	Policy / Governance
Maintenance cultures	Building-as-service	Maintenance budgets, lifecycle costing
Shared / flexible use of space	Space-as-service	Flexible zoning, shared use agreements
Repair and stewardship	Performance-based contracts	Circular procurement, repair requirements
Adaptation over time	Flexible, modular, multi-use buildings	Adaptive reuse approvals, reuse-first rules
Local livelihood systems	Managed but inclusive spatial platforms	Trader support, waste-picker integration, tenure protection

A shift from buildings as static products to buildings as long-term systems of care, maintenance, performance and reuse.

Designing space for access, time-sharing, flexibility and shared use rather than single-purpose ownership.

- Shared community kitchens
- Market infrastructure used at different times of day
- Tool libraries / repair cafés
- Shared workshops / maker spaces
- Flexible public halls / schools after hours
- Shared mobility hubs

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A circular city recognises and retains the value of its people,
places, materials and ecosystems